

Title: Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

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Six years ago a wonderful little boy entered our lives. He was born with cocaine in his system, to parents I loved but could not understand. On this day, I knew that one day this little child would be in my home, what I didn't know was how hard the battle would be to keep him with us. I was always under the impression that grandparents had rights. I found during this time that our young people are able to obtain drugs easier than a grandparent can get assistance.

Our grandson would have gone in to Foster Care. So I spent \$60,000.00 in legal fees for our son's divorce and the cost of getting the documents to read that my son has custody and that my grandson has to reside with me. I thought things were completed. I still had no guardianship and our attorney wanted \$5,000.00 more to assist with this process.

In October 2003, I attended the Grandparents Rally in Washington, D.C. There I discovered the Illinois Council on Aging and Barbara

Schwartz. Barbara in turn assisted me with locating various agencies in Illinois. It was one such agency, Extended Family Service, Lutheran

Family Services and a young woman by the name of Olandis Gilmore, who assisted me with the guardianship process at no cost.

Since last October, I have become active in assisting grandparents from over 10 states. I have spoken before groups and have found out what grandparents need.

1. We need a 1-800-GRANDMA phone number - across the country - that would assist us in the process of custody, guardianship

and adoption, at no cost. This agency would connect them with a person in their state that would assist in getting food stamps,

medical, dental, information regarding Early Intervention, Head Start and School Assistance. Early Intervention programs are

especially necessary for the children who are born with drugs in their system. Many grandparents need to be educated in these

avenues.

2. We need more Grandfamily Homes, like the one in Boston and the one Mayor Daley is planning in Chicago. Many grandparents are

on a fixed income and in senior complexes - no children are welcome and now with Medicare fees being increased, things will be a little

harder. Many are in 1 - bedroom apartments with 2 - 7 children living with them.

3. Many of our children enter Foster Care without the biological families being notified. Many of these children are then placed up for

adoption. These adoption agencies then receive monies from the Federal Government - the bonuses were proposed by the

Clinton Administration in the Adoption 2002 initiative and were included in the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997. This program

was created with good intentions; however, in many cases family members were never notified.

In 1998 Adoption Incentive Bonuses for Illinois, baseline with 2,200 children, 4,656 were adopted, with a bonus of \$6,869,733.00 given

to the State of Illinois. Why should any state be making money off of our children? These children are taken to churches, community

houses and paraded in front of groups of potential parents; they are shown on TV and in a leading Chicago newspaper. These children

come in happy, thinking that they will have a loving home. If this does not happen they leave sad. Many grandparents wanted

their children but never were asked, or they were told, "It's out of your hands."

4. All grandparents should receive Temporary Assistance for Needy Families payments at one set fee; this also should apply to

grandparents who are collecting Social Security benefits for their grandchildren. Right now the TANF program gives \$100.00 for the

1st child and then it is reduced by \$10.00 or more for the next. Grandparents should be collecting monies from TANF regarding their

income - however; caseworkers deny many of them.

5. We are worried about better education opportunities for our children. We worry about college expenses, even in grade school -

many of us cannot pay the registration fees - and this is in a public school system.

The No Child Left Behind Act has left many of our American children behind. This Act should have a committee review its policies and improve upon them.

A country so wonderful as ours can assist other countries in building new homes for others, new schools, provide tutoring for

children and offer them financial assistance - but when an American grandparent goes for assistance, the doors are closed. It's

time that our White House opens its doors and listens to the people who are caring for America's future - OUR CHILDREN.